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Summary

Samenvatting

Summary

For a number of reasons sport plays a prominent role in society. According to several scientific studies and conventional wisdom, sport participation can be linked to all kinds of health, social and school related effects. Therefore, a policy aim in many Western European countries is to increase sport participation among young people. However, many projects and studies aimed at sport (participation) tend to reduce sport to mere movement, without any reference to the social context. This leads to the assumption that sport participation can be stimulated by increasing the movement skills that children have. In **part I** of this thesis, the process leading to sport participation is discussed.

In **chapter 1**, the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu and identity theory were used to explain how the social and cultural context of movement can be hypothesised to be invaluable in the process leading to sport participation. Based on these theoretical frameworks, it was hypothesised that the possession of mere movement skills is not enough to explain sport participation.

The intricate interplay between the possession of movement skills and the social and cultural context of movement is further explored in **chapter 2**. A framework that is increasingly used in policy and practice to describe the arsenal of movement skills necessary for physical activity and sports is *physical literacy*. Although the concept of *physical literacy* departs from a holistic view of the human being, it is often interpreted as a framework for *fundamental movement skills*, without a reference to the social or cultural context in which those movements take place. It is argued in chapter 2 that the (dualistic) language used in the conceptualisation of *physical literacy* leaves room for this misinterpretation of the concept. Furthermore, based on the work of Mauss and Bourdieu, it is explained how the concept lacks a reference to the social and cultural context that affects the way in which movements become meaningful. Therefore, it is concluded that a different terminology is necessary in research and policy concerning sport participation. *Sport identity* is proposed as a concept that is more suitable when discussing sport participation, because it unambiguously incorporates the influence of movement skills and the social and cultural context of movement on the role that sport plays in the lives of people. Sport identity has been linked empirically to long-term sport participation. With a reference to the work of Bourdieu, the elements that seem invaluable for sport participation were termed the technical aspects of sporting capital (e.g., sport skills, knowledge about rules and tactics) and socio-cultural aspects of sporting capital (e.g., network of 'sporty' people, knowing social and cultural rules of engagement at sporting clubs, etc.).

It is conceived that both the technical and the social/cultural aspects of sporting capital are necessary to develop a sport identity, which increases that chances of long-term sport participation.

In **chapter 3**, it is explained that *physical literacy* is used in the Netherlands as a framework for fundamental movement skills with the aim of detecting sport talents. This interpretation and use of the concept of physical literacy in the Netherlands is scrutinised on three points. First, based on the philosophical foundations of physical literacy, it can be argued that the social and cultural context have an influence on how movements are learned, executed and become meaningful. However, within the interpretation of *physical literacy* in the Netherlands, the social and cultural context of movement is being neglected. Second, the idea that learning fundamental movements will lead to sport participation is sociologically problematic. Third, the focus on elite athleticism does not seem to be in line with the basic principles of physical literacy that is aimed at participation for all in different kinds of physical activity pursuits, in which everybody can reach his or her own potential, regardless of their level compared to others.

In **part II** of this thesis, it was investigated how the school context might contribute to the formation of a sport identity. The main focus in this part of the thesis is on extra-curricular school sports and not curricular physical education. Although different studies showed that the formation of a sport identity is largely dependent on sporting capital that is inherited through the family, it was hypothesised in **chapter 4** that school sports might also be able to influence the acquisition of sporting capital. As sporting capital is an important aspect of sport identity, school sport participation was expected to be related to the formation of the sport identity. This was expected to be especially true for those who did not inherit sporting capital through their family. Furthermore, based on studies from the USA, it was hypothesised that school sport might contribute to the bond that students have with their school, which might lead to better school results.

Historically, sports have not been integrated in the school context in the Netherlands. This resulted in the organisation of youth sports in sporting clubs that are independent of schools, in contrast to for instance the USA where school sports are more common. Despite the distance between schools and sporting clubs, sport gradually entered the education system in the last part of the 20th century. In **chapter 5**, a history of the development and policy regarding school sports in the Netherlands was described. Current school sport initiatives can be divided in (i) *Sports at school* (sport introduction and orientation within the (PE-) curriculum); (ii) *Sports near school* (opportunities to play sports in and around

the school building without much involvement of the school); and (iii) *Sports representing school* (initiatives in which students from one school represent their school against teams from other schools).

Most of the policy expectations of school sports in the Netherlands were based on studies that investigated school sports in the USA. In **chapter 6**, it was hypothesised that the cultural context of school sports largely determines the organisation and social functioning of school sports, and therefore the effects that participation in school sports may have. To investigate this hypothesis, the Dutch and American school sports systems were described and compared on five elements: the competitiveness, intensity, prestige, status and the use of eligibility criteria. The findings suggest that American and Dutch school sports differ on these five characteristics and that these elements are strongly determined by the cultural contexts of school sports in both countries. It is therefore concluded that the findings of studies investigating school sports should be interpreted in the light of the cultural context in which the studies were conducted and generalisations of research outcomes should be made carefully, in particular if translated to sport policy. This means that research in the Netherlands is necessary to underpin Dutch school sport policy.

At newly developed sport campuses in the Netherlands, sporting clubs and schools are located near each other, without curricular or extra-curricular integration of sports. In **chapter 7**, it was investigated whether the mere proximity of schools and sporting facilities has any influence on the outcomes of young people participating in sporting clubs. Drawing on identity theory, *student identity* was used as a measure of school bonding and *sport identity* as an indication of long-term sport participation in a survey of 140 students, participating either in sporting clubs near their school, other sporting clubs or not playing sports at all. The results showed that sport identity was related to participation in club sports, whereas student identity was not. In addition, the location of the sporting clubs, either at the campus or not, did not affect this relationship. Therefore, it can be concluded that the mere proximity of school and sport facilities is not sufficient to make a difference between sporting clubs at a campus and other sporting clubs.

Although it is often expected that school sport participation leads to all kinds of social, educational and health outcomes, it may also be that students with a certain predisposition are more inclined to participate in school sports and that the 'outcomes' were already present before participation started. In **chapter 8**, a longitudinal survey study was described that investigated whether participation in an elementary school sport competition affected the sport identity and student identity of children (socialisation hypothesis), or whether children with a certain

predisposition were more inclined to participate (selection hypothesis). The results of the study showed that participation in the competition did not alter their sport identity. No relationship existed between participation and student identity. Furthermore, the results indicated that boys and girls with a strong sport identity were more inclined to participate in the school sport competition. In contrast to commonplace assumptions about the socialising effects of school sport participation, the study in chapter 8 suggests that a selected, predisposed group of children with a strong sport identity tends to participate in school sports.

As the quantitative studies in chapter 7 and 8 indicated that participation in school sports was not related to sport identity, it was investigated what social contexts did affect the sport identity in **chapter 9**. Many studies showed lower sport participation levels of youngsters with a lower socio-economic status (SES). Most of these studies focussed on the barriers for youngsters from lower SES families to participate in sport. However, in the study presented in chapter 9, the socialisation into sports of young adolescents from lower SES families that *do* participate in organised sports was investigated. A total of nine girls and twelve boys from lower SES families that participated in organised sport were interviewed about the influences of family, school and peers as socialising contexts for sport participation. Parents were found to be the main influencers of the sport identity of these young adolescents. The school context appeared to have no influence on their sport socialisation. Peers were found to have an influence on the choice for a specific type of sport. These findings show that the sport socialisation of young adolescents from lower SES families is similar to the sport socialisation of youngsters from higher SES families found in other studies. Therefore, it is suggested that SES is not a determining factor in the sport socialisation process. Although fewer children from lower SES families are socialised into sports, the process of socialisation into organised sport does seem relatively independent of social class for young adolescents. This finding has implications for research and policy regarding sport participation levels of youngsters from lower SES families.

In **Part III**, the results of the previous chapters were discussed and conclusions were drawn. In **chapter 10**, it was described that in order to stimulate sport participation, children should learn more than the technical aspects of sports, as the social aspects of sport participation are crucial for sport socialisation. Therefore, the sport identity, instead of mere technical sport skills, should be stimulated in order to increase the likelihood that children will start or continue to participate in sports.

In the second part of this thesis, it was found that sport identity is related to sport participation in general, although not specifically to participation in school sports. Moreover, it seems that students that have already developed a sport identity are more likely to participate in school sports. It seems that parents have a strong influence on the sport identity of their children. Other social contexts, like the school, have only limited possibilities to influence predispositions in sport identity that are inherited through the family. In addition, school sport participation in the Netherlands was not found to be related to school bonding. The finding that the relationship between school sport participation, sport identity and school bonding were different from those found in the USA, can be explained by the fact that school sport participation in the Netherlands is less intensive, competitive and important for the status of students, when compared to school sports in the USA.

The studies in this thesis did provide a more thorough understanding of sport socialisation and the limited role that the school plays in this process in the Netherlands. Moreover, it seems that the process of sport socialisation is relatively independent of socio-economic status. An implication for policy-makers is that school sports should be aimed at developing the sport identity of students, in order to increase the chances of influencing sport participation patterns in the long run. Suggestions were made for different organisational forms of school sports in the Netherlands that might increase the chances of influencing the sport identity. Future studies should investigate whether the new forms of school sport might indeed affect the sport identity and long-term sport participation.